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Aretuza

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"The girls go in as raw, unpolished stones, weeping for their mothers. They come out as diamonds sharp enough to cut a king's throat. But the pressure required to forge them... it leaves no room for childish things or fragile hearts." — Arch-Mistress of Aretuza

The Isle of Thanedd in Temeria is home to Aretuza, an academy of magic attended by daughters of some of the most prestigious families in the North, though they accept girls from anywhere in the world with the right potential. Thanedd is an isolated rock, which has been sculpted over the centuries into terraces and soaring towers, forming a series of distinct structures.

While it functions as a highly elite educational institution, it operates with the strictness of a fortress. Girls at Aretuza are cloistered during their years at school. They are taught more esoteric magics than the boys, as well as a large number of skills in order to make the young sorceress more beautiful and more able to influence others.

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Atmosphere & Rules of the Region

The atmosphere in Aretuza is one of intense academic pressure and cutthroat social maneuvering. Isolating the students for their entire education promotes a hothouse atmosphere, but also makes interpersonal politics a survival skill.

Operating within Aretuza means navigating its strict, unyielding rules:

- **The Price of Prestige:** Aretuza has a strong academic focus and a traditional private school structure, with fees standing at 1,200 crowns per year and an atmosphere somewhere between a dedicated university and a girls' finishing school.
- **Absolute Isolation:** Outsiders are banned from entering the school and the students cannot leave. Once they have joined, adepts cannot leave the school until graduation without facing punishment.
- **The Sterilization Rite:** Aretuza students are magically sterilized to avoid the unpredictable effects of giving birth to potentially unstable children. This redirects their energies toward success and personal power and makes strategic alliances more common than trust.

Layout & Locations

The Isle of Thanedd is heavily structured, separating the mundane world from the arcane secrets hidden within its highest towers.

- **Loxia:** This palace guards the bridge to the mainland and is the only place visitors and students may mix. It serves as a testing ground where adepts practice their social skills and see the practical results of political interactions they have studied.
- **Aretuza Proper:** The academy proper stands adjacent to Garstang, housing the classrooms, dormitories, and grand libraries where the adepts learn the theory and practice of magic as a science first, art second.
- **Garstang:** A grand palace used to host gatherings of honored guests from the magical community and visiting alumni of the academy. Its walls have been infused with a powerful aura that blocks the effects of magic.
- **The Secret Sea Caves:** A hidden, subterranean entrance allowing boats to land inside the hollow mountain, completely bypassing the heavily guarded bridge at Loxia.

Prices & Services

Because Aretuza is entirely cloistered, commerce is strictly handled by the school's administration or through highly illegal smuggling rings orchestrated by the adepts themselves.

Academy Administration & Vaults

Official goods and services are incredibly expensive, reflecting the elite status of the institution.

Item / Service	Type	Cost	Description
Annual Tuition	Service	1,200 Crowns	The mandatory fee for attending the academy for one year.
Spell Formula (Novice)	Magic	100 Crowns	Parchment detailing the underlying theories and risks of a novice spell.

Spell Formula (Journeyman)	Magic	200 Crowns	Advanced theoretical parchment for journeyman incantations.
Enchanted Amulet (1 Spell)	Relic	550 Crowns	A reservoir of magic allowing mages to cast spells they otherwise could not.

Loxia Contraband (Smuggled Goods)

Adepts frequently bribe guards or use their budding magic to acquire mundane comforts from the outside world.

Item	Type	Cost	Description
Makeup Kit	Tool	40 Crowns	Highly prized by adepts mastering their "Grooming and Style" skills.
Sweets	Food	15 Crowns	A rare comfort in the strict, cold halls of the academy.
Invisible Ink	Tool	30 Crowns	Essential for passing secret notes and forming strategic alliances behind the backs of the mistresses.

Key Personnel

- **Margarita Laux-Antille:** The current Rectoress of Aretuza. Descended from a powerful magical lineage, she is known for her devotion to her school and her students. Despite her physical perfection and elite status, she is notably less arrogant than her peers.
- **Tissaia de Vries:** The previous Rectoress of Aretuza and a legendary figure whose strict discipline and towering ambition still heavily influence the academy's culture today.
- **The Loxia Guards:** A handpicked contingent of heavily armed guards stationed at the lowest palace. They enforce the strict border between the mainland and the school, turning away all unauthorized visitors.

The Academy Staff

Running the school requires a hierarchy of power. The Mistresses are not just teachers; they are the primary architects of the political future of the North.

Personnel	Role	Primary Function
Margarita Laux-Antille	Rectoress	Ultimate authority; oversees student development and diplomatic relations.
Mistress of Oratory	Senior Faculty	Teaches the art of social influence, politics, and manipulation (Grooming and Style, Persuasion, Deceit).
Mistress of Theory	Senior Faculty	Strict instructor in magical science; monitors students for "instability".
The Loxia Warden	Security Chief	Oversees the Loxia palace guards and the bridge to the mainland.
Archivist	Librarian	Manages the restricted archives; the primary gatekeeper of Spell Formulae.

The Scholastic Tracking System

Students are not just residents; they are adepts in training.

- **Academic Discipline:** Every week of in-game time, adepts must pass a **DC:15 Education check**.
    - **Success:** Advance in the Aretuza syllabus.
    - **Failure:** A reprimand from the Mistress of Theory. Three reprimands lead to expulsion or mandatory reassignment to the school's alchemical laboratories for manual labor.
- **The Hothouse Politics:** Adepts gain **Influence Points** by navigating the social structures of Loxia. These points can be spent to gain access to restricted areas of the academy or to petition the Rectoress for favors.

The Isolation & Security System

Aretuza is a fortress. Use these rules to handle movement and monitoring.

- **Magical Surveillance:** The academy employs "eyes" everywhere. Any overt use of magic outside of designated training chambers requires a **DC:18 Magic Training check** to mask. Failure alerts a Mistress.
- **The Bridge Toll (Loxia Palace):** Entry is tightly controlled. Visitors without a direct summons from the Rectoress face a **DC:20 Persuasion or Intimidation check** to pass the Loxia guards.

Module Events Table

Use these hooks to drive the module's narrative.

Roll (1d6)	Event Hook	Description
1-2	**The Forbidden Tome**	A student is caught smuggling forbidden knowledge out of the archive. They beg the party to hide them.
3-4	**The Diplomatic Crisis**	A visiting dignitary in Loxia is revealed to be a doppler or a spy, threatening the school's neutrality.
5	**The Sterilization Error**	A student reveals their sterilization was botched. They now possess wild, uncontrollable surges of magic.
6	**The Sea Cave Incursion**	Monsters have breached the sea caves. The Warden recruits the party to clear the caves in absolute silence.

Managing the "Aretuza Economy"

The academy is expensive, with tuition set at 1,200 crowns per year.

- **The Smuggler's Cut:** Since adepts cannot leave, a thriving black market exists within the dormitories for "luxuries" (perfumes, sweets, forbidden books). Any merchant smuggling goods through the sea caves charges a **200% markup** on all base prices.
- **Scholastic Debt:** Adepts who cannot pay their tuition are often "sponsored" by noble houses or royal secret services, creating hidden plot hooks where the student is effectively a spy for their sponsor.

The Library

Standard Academic Texts (Stable)

- **"The Symbiosis of Ley Lines" by Brandon of Oxenfurt**
    - *Description:* A foundational text that maps the major ley lines across the Continent. It focuses on identifying elemental convergences and the safest methods for drawing minor currents.
    - *Utility:* Grants a **+2 bonus to Education or Magic Training** checks when attempting to locate local ley lines.
- **"Principles of Social Alchemy"**
    - *Description:* An Aretuza classic. This text argues that the psychological manipulation of courtiers is a branch of alchemy itself, treating emotions like chemical reagents.
    - *Utility:* Grants a **+2 bonus to Persuasion or Seduction** when navigating high-court political scenarios.

Restricted Academic Texts (Dangerous Knowledge)

- **"The Theory of Destabilized Spheres"**
    - *Description:* A scholarly, albeit incredibly dangerous, look at how portals can be "trapped" or redirected. It serves as the primary study guide for creating *Trap Portals*.
    - *Utility:* Enables the reader to learn the *Trap Portal* spell. However, reading it requires a **DC:16 Resist Magic check** to avoid a temporary bout of vertigo.
- **"The Anatomy of the Unnatural"**

- *Description:* A dry, clinical study of non-human biology and monster mutations. It is often used by senior students researching ways to "improve" on natural biological constraints.
    - *Utility:* Grants a **+3 bonus to Monster Lore** but is notoriously difficult to read, requiring **3 days of study** to gain the benefit.

Forbidden Tomes (Highly Restricted)

- **"Codex of the Shifting Face"**
    - *Description:* An ancient, illegible text that seems to change its language based on who is holding it. It is the primary source of lore regarding Zuopiura and the nature of stolen identities.
    - *Utility:* If a player spends 1 week studying this, they may learn the *Vocal Mirror* invocation. However, after the week is up, they must make a **DC:18 Resist Coercion check**; failure results in the player gaining a permanent **-1 EMP** as their sense of self begins to fracture.
- **"The Rissburg Protocol"**
    - *Description:* A leather-bound volume detailing the "Chimera Protocols" of Rissburg Castle. It provides step-by-step instructions for grafting limbs and combining monster DNA.
    - *Utility:* This tome acts as the **Advanced Mutation Experiment DC chart**. It allows a player to attempt to add traits to creatures, but possession of this book is considered **high treason** by both the Brotherhood and the local authorities.

GM Note: Library Security

Accessing these tomes is part of the challenge.

1. **The Archivist's Favor:** The Archivist is a stern, magically-attuned guardian. To borrow a *Forbidden Tome*, a student must pass a **DC:20 Persuasion check** or present an official seal from the Rectoress.
2. **Tracking:** All forbidden tomes are bound with an *Invisible Ribbon* or a similar tracking ward. If a book leaves the library premises without proper clearance, the Archivist is alerted immediately.

Rumors & Plot Hooks

The Sea Cave Syndicate

A group of desperate adepts, unable to pay the exorbitant 1,200 crown tuition to finish their studies, have discovered the secret sea caves beneath the mountain. They are using the caves to smuggle rare alchemical ingredients and magical artifacts out of the school to sell in Gors Velen. However, their last courier never returned, and terrible, echoing shrieks have started echoing up through the cavern shafts at night. The adepts need outsiders to navigate the sea caves and recover their stolen goods before Rectoress Margarita discovers their treason.

The Garstang Gambit

A high-profile summit of Northern kings and prominent mages is scheduled to take place at Garstang. A faction of anti-magic zealots has realized that Garstang's walls are infused with a powerful aura that entirely blocks the effects of magic. They plan to spring an assassination trap inside the palace walls, knowing the most powerful sorceresses on the Continent will be rendered entirely defenseless and unable to cast portals to escape.

The Archivist's Test (The Subtle Theft)

- **The Hook:** A brilliant but impoverished student—the players' friend—is desperate to pay her 1,200 crown tuition to avoid being expelled and sent back to a life of poverty. She has discovered that the *Codex of the Shifting Face* in the restricted archives contains a ritual that could help her secure a permanent position with a royal house.
- **The Conflict:** The tome is protected by *Invisible Ribbon* wards. The player characters must help their friend bypass the Archivist, navigate the library's magical security, and steal the tome without triggering the alarm that would alert the Rectoress.
- **The Moral Dilemma:** The Archivist is a kind, overworked woman who has been generous to the students. Does the party trick and humiliate her to help their friend, or do they find another way?

The Loxia Breach (The Combat Module)

- **The Hook:** Late at night, a terrifying, guttural shrieking echoes up from the forbidden sea caves beneath Loxia, the only bridge to the mainland. The

Warden recruits the party, promising "academic leniency" if they can clear the breach in absolute silence before the morning bell.
- **The Conflict:** A group of drowned, warped creatures—possibly failed experiments from the school's own alchemical laboratories—have climbed up from the sea. The party must fight them in the cramped, damp corridors of the caves, ensuring the fighting doesn't draw the attention of the Mistresses, who maintain a "hothouse atmosphere" of absolute control.
- **The Twist:** Among the monsters, the players find an initiate who has been missing for weeks, now partially mutated by the *Chimera Protocols*. Do they kill their former classmate, or do they risk everything to smuggle her back to the academy infirmary?

The Diplomatic Poison (The Intrigue Module)

- **The Hook:** A high-profile diplomatic summit is taking place in Garstang. The party is tasked with serving as the security detail for a visiting noble whose heir is being considered for an apprenticeship.
- **The Conflict:** They discover a plot to poison the noble using *Bigelow's Befoulment* (a ritual that causes the Disease condition). The plot was orchestrated by a rival noble house that wants the apprenticeship slot for their own child.
- **The Complication:** The party finds the poison hidden inside a crate of *Trail Rations* that were clearly sourced from the school's own black-market supply. They must identify the student smuggler who brought it in, navigate the political pressure from both noble houses, and expose the corruption without alerting the Mistresses—who are desperate to keep the summit peaceful to maintain the academy's reputation.

GM Note: The Aretuza Experience

The Aretuza module is built on the theme of **Elite Confinement.** Players should feel the weight of their lack of freedom. Every social interaction is a potential trap, and every academic failure has severe consequences. Remind players that they are not just students; they are the future "power behind the throne" of the North.

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